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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003835

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: VP HASHIMI AND SUNNI ARABS BATTLE FOR A PLACE IN
IRAQ,S GOVERNMENT

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[1B](#). BAGHDAD 3335

[1C](#). BAGHDAD 3609

Classified By: Daniel Speckhard for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[11](#). (C) SUMMARY: During recent meetings with the Ambassador, Sunni Arab VP Tariq Al-Hashimi has taken a more upbeat tone when discussing the political process and prospects for cooperation with other players. This is a significant change from Hashimi's tenor during August and early September, where he expressed frustration at his marginalization in the largely ceremonial post of Vice President. Hashimi's shifts in tone come in response to increased engagement with counterparts in the Shia-led unity government. Sunni bloc Tawafuq contacts share this perception of Hashimi as capable but "constrained" in carving out a role for himself as Vice President. Other Tawafuq leaders face similar battles to assert themselves in Iraq's Shia-dominated national government and to respond to the needs of their already-skeptical Sunni constituencies. END SUMMARY.

Hashimi More Upbeat

[12](#). (C) During his last two meetings with the Ambassador, Hashimi appeared to be increasingly upbeat and engaged in the political process compared to previous meetings. On September 26, he stated he had just come from a two-hour "brainstorming session" with Shia SCIRI party VP Abdel Mehdi and others, where the attendees participated in a "frank conversation" about federalism and the future of Iraq. He said that the meeting was "a step in the right direction" and gave a positive review of Abdel Mehdi as an interlocutor. At the same meeting, Hashimi appeared receptive to a suggestion from PM Maliki relayed through the Ambassador that Tawafuq temporarily close an office in a predominantly-Shia district of Baghdad, until the area could be cleared of militias. Hashimi responded positively to a second suggestion from Maliki (passed through the Ambassador) that he delay the upcoming Anbar tribal conference he was planning so as to broaden the guest list to include more diverse points of view and avoid the perception that the conference was driven only by Hashimi's party.

[13](#). (C) Hashimi's more upbeat attitude is a significant departure from what Emboffs have observed recently, suggesting that VP Hashimi's attitude toward the unity government depend on his counterparts' efforts to engage him. Hashimi has previously complained to the Ambassador of deliberate efforts to minimize the influence of Sunnis in Iraq's unity government. He particularly criticized PM Maliki for not returning his phone calls, not following up on

requests for meetings and information, and not consulting him on key issues.

¶4. (C) During a September 11 meeting, the Ambassador encouraged Hashimi to engage through mechanisms such as the Policy Council on National Security (PCNS). Hashimi responded by expressing doubts about the body's utility, saying that it was disorganized and surmising that the non-Sunni members would probably prefer it if he did not attend. Hashimi even discouraged fellow Sunni PCNS members CoR Speaker Mahmoud Mashadani and DPM Salam Zawbai from attending one of the PCNS meetings (ref B). During the same meeting, Hashimi complained to the Ambassador that President Talabani was two faced - sympathizing with his plight in private, but not doing anything to bridge the gap between Hashimi and PM Maliki in public. Hashimi expressed concern about his perceived decline in stature since taking the position of Vice President, saying that he feared being compared to his predecessor Ghazi Al-Yawir - a largely ineffective Sunni Arab representative. He told the Ambassador on September 11 that if he could not effectively serve the Iraqi people as Vice-President, he would rather return "home" to the IIP.

Hashimi in Context

¶5. (C) Alaa Mekki, a high-ranking official in Hashimi's Iraqi Islami Party (IIP) told poloff on September 22 that the IIP is well aware of the constraints Hashimi is facing as Vice President, but the party firmly supports PM Maliki and the national unity government. He said that the party - and Hashimi as its president - is bound to this position and any change to it must first be agreed upon within the IIP. Mekki

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and other Sunni contacts have told Ppoloff that Hashimi's frustrations echo throughout Tawafuq ranks. He noted that the two other Sunni government leaders officials - CoR Speaker Mahmoud Mashadani and Deputy Prime Minister Salam Zawbai - also complain of feeling marginalized at the national level.

Major Challenges Ahead for Tawafuq

¶6. (C) As Tawafuq coalition partner National Dialogue Council chair Sheikh Khalaf Ulayan has repeatedly told poloff, "We lack experience." In comparison with their Kurdish counterparts, who have been in the democracy business for over a decade, and Shia coalition representatives, many of whom have been in government for three years or who gained political experience in building organizations opposing Saddam's regime, the Sunnis have found themselves ill-equipped to compete. Many of those that were chosen to fill Tawafuq's slots in the Council of Representatives (CoR), Ulayan has complained, have little experience in the government and were chosen for party and family connections. In the case of the regions formation law, Tawafuq has resorted to walking out of sessions or provoking extended debates to staff for time.

¶7. (C) Because most Tawafuq CoR members lack experience, the burden of organizing the bloc's positions on issues and political strategies falls on a small group of members. While NDI and IRI contacts have noted that Tawafuq has shown the highest rates of attendance at their training seminars and appear to have benefited the most from them, Tawafuq still has a long way to go. IIP official Makki acknowledged to Emboffs on August 19 this lack of capacity has led to situations where Tawafuq has been passive on key issues pertinent to Sunni interests such as De-Baathification, and unprepared and disorganized on the regions formation bill and Constitutional Review until the last moment.

Sunnis Unable to Deliver on Promises

18. (C) Tawafuq CoR member Dhafer Al-Ani (who recently resigned from his post as chair of the CoR's Governorates committee) complained bitterly to poloff on September 10 that Sunni elected officials have not been able to deliver on the political promises made during their elections campaign. They are not able to provide their constituents with basic services, jobs, or security. Sunnis do not have weapons to fight off Sunni militia attacks, and the number of Sunnis taken into prison has depleted their community of many able-bodied men. Ani said that Sunnis blamed these problems on the U.S. and Sunni politicians who had cooperated with the U.S. Sunni political figures also blamed these troubles on the U.S. and other parties in the political process, who were not fulfilling the promises made during government formation negotiation, and in his view, making a mockery of the Sunnis and of the concept of a unity government. In a phone call with poloff to report violence against Sunnis in Baghdad, Ala Mekki pleaded for MNF-I intervention, saying that IIP politicians would lose credibility with Sunnis if it could not get security forces to respond to calls from their constituents.

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